From the Editor

We have now stepped on the fifth number of issues overcoming a lot of obstructions on the way. There is but one hope before us that is we have to overcome more—more obstructions to be set aside, maybe they will cost more hurdle. However, we have been successful to publish a number good research articles, poems and reviews. Thanks to Pratiti Shirin, Assistant Professor of Dhaka University, Bangladesh for contributing in this issue with a review on Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* and to Pritika Gupta, an undergraduate student at Ashoka University, Haryana for writing an excellent article on Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Though a novice to write an article maintaining MLA style or so, Pritika Gupta is very promising. We have published several poems with splendid thoughts and way of expressions. And thanks to all the members of the Editorial Board who reviewed, scrutinised and edited all these submissions.

Editor

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Gender in Children's Literature

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Abstract

Children's literature always helps to shape the blooming minds in an interesting way. Here I will discuss how gender roles are portrayed in the children's literature down the ages. We can notice stereotypical gender roles in the eighteenth century fairy tales. The Grimm's Brothers deliberately changed the original texts with additions, deletions and alterations to teach the children of their gender roles in favour of the then patriarchal system. Defoe and Swift emphasise the superiority of man to woman. Sex and gender became matters of discussion in children's literature of 1960s and 1970s. When scholars realized that theories related to feminism help empower women, popular texts were discussed in new ways and help the young ones to understand the gender equality in a better way.

Keywords: children's literature, gender, Grimm's Brothers, patriarchy, feminism

Books and visual literature help children to understand their society and their culture. When children go through stories in books or visual literature and discuss them, they develop their intellect, become more pragmatic and expand the horizon of their mind. Children are made aware of the dominant ideologies through books or visual literature. According to Peter Hunt, we study children's literature "... because it is important, and because it is fun – children's books have, and have had, great social and educational influence; they are important both politically and commercially. From historical point of view, children's books are valuable contribution to social, literary and bibliographical history; from contemporary point of view, they are vital to literacy and culture and are at the leading edge of the trend towards image-

and-word, rather than simply written words" (*Criticism, Theory and Children's Literature* 17).

Children's literature begins with oral stories, poems and songs and *Aesop's Fables* was the first printed book in Europe. In the seventeenth century the Puritans produced children's literature focussing on education. Children's literature got its distinguished identity in the second half of eighteenth century. Newbery, an important figure in publishing children's books, published about thirty books including *A Little Pretty Pocket- Book* (1744), *Mother Goose Rhymes* (1765) and others. During bedtime children used to listen to the lullabies found in *Mother Goose Rhymes*. Newbery included stories like *Cinderella* and *Beauty and the Beast* in *Newbery Mother Goose Stories.* In fairy tales we notice how writers try to inculcate the idea of gender roles among children. They can effectively develop children's sex-role identity through their adept use of literature. From time to time fairy tales changed noticeably with the ever changing spirit of society. Fairy tales were part of oral tradition and originally belonged to the matriarchal system. Writers shape fairy tales according to their own need and that can be noticed in seventeenth century. Zipes said, "... the institutionalizing of the literary fairy tale, begun in the salons during the seventeenth century, was for adults arose out of a need by aristocratic women to elaborate and conceive other alternatives in society than those prescribed for them by men" (*Fairy Tale* 23).

During the first half of the eighteenth century the writers of children's literature had two objectives: to amuse children and instil good manners and morals in them. In this process they were directly or indirectly taught their gender roles. It was really very tough for women to contribute to children's literature and even if they wrote, support for patriarchy was deep rooted in their writings. Everywhere good looks, devoutness, submissiveness, meekness, subordination and passivity of women were praised.

In Germany, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm published the first volume of *Kinder—und Hausmärchen* (meaning 'Children's and Household Stories') in 1812 in order to collect and preserve popular German folklores. It was among the first and notable collection of folklores and fairy tales and a noticeable attempt to popularize traditional oral tale types such as *Hansel and Gretel, The Frog Prince, Sleeping Beauty* and *Cinderella.* These tales were translated by Edgar Taylor who published a book named *German Popular Stories* (1823-26) and also modified according to the taste of the children. The Grimm's Brothers deliberately added many things and altered the original texts according to what they wanted children to learn. They "emphasized specific role models for male and female protagonists according to the dominant patriarchal code of that time" (Zipes, *When Dreams Came True* 74). In most cases gender is intentionally stereotyped in children's literature to make children cautious about the cultural standards of gender. While discussing gender in nursery rhymes from *Mother Goose's Melody* Coltrane in his *Gender and Families* (1998) says that gender stereotyping is done in these rhymes "teach young people the cultural standards for masculinity and femininity. Many are cautionary tales about what happens when one violates those cultural standards" (110). For the girls he says:

> Polly, Dolly, Kate, and Molly,
> All are filled with pride and folly,
> Polly tattles, Dolly wriggles,
> Katty rattles, Molly giggles;
> Whoever knew such constant rattling,
> Wriggling, giggling, noise, and tattling (109)

> And for the boys he adds:
> When I was a little boy

My mama kept me in:

Now I am a great big boy

I'm fit to serve the king;

I can handle a musket;

And I can smoke a pipe;

And I can kiss a bonny girl,

At twelve o'clock at night (109)

Reading Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) were always a source of pleasure to both adults and children. Misogynistic attitudes are found in the writings of the most eighteenth century male writers. In Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* female role is not given importance. The early part of the novel covers Crusoe's adventures on the island, which are generally looked upon as male acts but no female character becomes the part of his narrative. Absence of women or a little scope for them in the writing reveals Defoe's attitudes towards women. His intentions become more clear in the preface to the novel when he offers his writings about 'man' to a readership of "wise and good Men" (1972 01). Here, gender roles are portrayed stereotypically.

Swift portrays women as inferior, insignificant and secondary having excess of emotion, lacking rationality and guided by impulse. In the novel he expresses his distaste to female body which actually exposes his misogynistic nature. The expressions like "the caprices of womankind" and "lament their confinement" in Swift's *Gulliver's Travel* hint at the narrative of patriarchal culture.

"The wives and daughters lament their confinement to the island, although I think it the most delicious spot of ground in the world; and although they live here in the greatest plenty and magnificence" (Part 03 Chapter 02 Page 20).

"This may perhaps pass with the reader rather for a European or English story, than for one of a country so remote. But he may please to consider, that the caprices of womankind are not limited by any climate or nation, and that they are much more uniform, than can be easily imagined" (Part 03 Chapter 02 Page 20).

After the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution condition of children and women got better which gives children's literature a good opportunity to thrive. Women who understood children's psychology and their need more than men and more importantly are capable of raising children became more interested to contribute to the writing for children. Maria Edgeworth's household tales help children to develop their moral character. Gender roles were still limited to stereotypes in the literature. In *Little Women* (1868) Louis May Alcott portrays woman as a weak, passive and docile wife and could not come out of convention.

In the modern world scholars, critics and theorists or researchers seem to be interested in the issues of subversions and gender roles in the field of children's literature. Whenever anyone or any group is empowered, it is done at the expense of the other. In Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House* books (1932 onwards) and Enid Blyton's *The Famous Five* (novel series, 1942 onwards) two sets of woman characters are found- some want to play the role of conventional women and the others challenge stereotyped roles of a woman but ultimately give in to the norms of the society. Since then feminist and Marxist critics realized the need to empower the marginalized people and so took up the field of children's literature. Consequently popular texts of children's literature were read and reread differently in new ways.

Sex and gender in children's literature were much talked about in nineteen sixties and nineteen seventies. John Stephen illustrated masculinities and femininities in a schema in. He places two sets of characteristics – male and female in binary opposition. He includes traits

like strong, violent, unemotional, aggressive, competitive, rapacious, protective, player, independent, active, 'hunter', etc. for a man and traits like beautiful, non-violent, emotional, submissive, sharing, caring, vulnerable, prize, dependent, passive, 'victim', etc. for a woman ("Gender, Genre and Children's Literature" 18). According to him a "socially desirable man" will follow male stereotypes and a woman who challenges the female stereotypes will be "undesirable" (19).

According to Simone de Beauvoir, "[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (*The Second Sex* 301). She believes that sex is natural but gender is constructed. Contemporary writers of children's literature like J. K. Rowling, Stephenie Meyer and others have adeptly incorporated the gender issues in their works. In J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels (1997-2007) traditional roles of gender are challenged and conventions are broken. Here Hermione Granger is portrayed as superior to Harry and Ron when it comes to knowledge of magic. In the earlier novels of the series she looks confident in herself, and is clever, helpful and capable. Traditionally violence is associated with a man. When Voldemort, after killing Cedric, tries to kill Harry Potter, Harry does not show any violence and uses his magic only to disarm him. Draco Malfoy, Voldemort and Peter Pettigrew are portrayed as violent. In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix,* Harry wants to cast a spell on Bellatrix Lestrange because she is the killer of Harry's godfather, Sirius. But it does not work and she says: "You need to *mean* them, Potter! You need to really want to cause pain–to enjoy it—righteous anger won't hurt me for long–I'll show you how it is done, shall I?" (891). The statement shows Bellatrix's violence. It is very clear that violence is associated with evil and in this process traditional gender roles are subverted at some places.

Harry gets emotional whenever he remembers his parents and friends. Harry, earlier shy and insecure, is competitive and protective. In the Triwizard Tournament he saves his fellow champions at the cost of his rank in the tournament. He also helps Fleur and Krum and

saves Cedric from a giant spider. So he is first protective then competitive. Harry's friend Ron becomes more aware of his outer beauty before the Yule Ball at Hogwarts. Ron breaks the norms. Hermione also concentrates on her physical beauty to satisfy the male gaze. She succumbs to the social norms. Here, gender of the characters is based on performance. According to Judith Butler gender is not ascertained by one's body but it is repetition of "discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex" (*Gender Trouble* xxxi). Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman in their article "Doing Gender" says, "[G]ender is not a set of traits , nor a variable, nor a role, but the product of social doings of some sort"(129).

In Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series (2005-2008) characters do not much deviate from gender stereotypes. Here we find gender inequality in the novels. Bella is weak, submissive, obedient and docile. She wants to be tan, sporty and blond. She desperately needs Edward, who has extraordinary power for being vampire, to care and protect her. Bella is very close to the image in Brannon's "True Woman" (*Gender: Psychological Perspective* 162). On the other hand Edward belongs to a wealthy family, is extremely powerful and domineering. In the field of jobs male characters dominate. Carlisle is a doctor, Charlie the chief of Police, Mr. Mason, Mr. Banner, Mr. Varner- all are teachers whereas most of the woman characters either stay at home or are engaged in ordinary jobs like working as nurse, as receptionist, as waitress or as restaurant host.

In Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games,* Katniss Everdeen was a hunter for her and her family's survival. She has lost her father and her mother is in deep shock and grief. When she looks at her mother, she finds femininity as weak and dependent. Realizing this she chooses to adopt masculine gender roles and it was necessary for their survival in this cruel and hopeless world. She plays the role of a tomboy because she loves freedom. After her father's death she acts like a man to support her family. Katniss is adorned in the opening

ceremony of the hunger games and also at other places to attract the male desire. She manipulates the gaze by pretending to be in love with Peeta and she purposefully does all this to get lucrative sponsorship. Laura Mulvey says, "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female form which is styled accordingly" (*Visual and Other Pleasures* 19). In the epilogue of *Mockingjay* we find Katniss and Peeta have two children and there are no more hunger games for well-being of humanity. Tomboy Katniss could experiment with femininity and masculinity in her childhood but this transgression is acceptable to society only in childhood. With puberty she comes close to a man. So it ends up with heteronormativity and ultimately she learns and conforms to the female gender roles of the patriarchal system by becoming a wife and mother.

In *Disturbing the Universe* Roberta Trites says, "But in the adolescent novel, protagonists must learn about the social forces that have made them what they are. They learn to negotiate the levels of power that exist in the myriad social institutions within which they must function, including […] social constructions of sexuality and gender" (3). As children grow up, they come across different books or other forms of literature and try to relate themselves with characters there and also with various social institutions. Books as well as visual literature equip them to clarify their ideas about the social hierarchy and gender roles and help in shaping their identity. In the contemporary children's literature, change in attitudes towards gender is noticeable. Females are being depicted as ambitious, strong, independent and witty.

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The Power of Comedy

Jamal Akabli

Abstract

This article is an attempt to come to grips with an often unexplored facet of human nature, i. e. comedy. Whilst tragedy has received due attention, comedy has often been relegated to the margin as being unworthy of serious debate. In my endeavour to do justice to comedy, I stop awhile at tragedy to show that, though apparently distinct, the two genres have some binding threads in common. Then, I sketch out in chronological order the main theories experts elaborated to explain what it is that makes human susceptible to laughter, laughter being the legitimate child of comedy. Last but not least, I go on to explicate the power inherent in the comedic moment, a moment of healing and critique albeit transient.

Keywords: human, comedy, tragedy, theories, laughter, transient

Comedy is often thought of as the antithesis of tragedy, its alter ego. While tragedy commands a universalist appeal, comedy dies immediately upon birth.[1] "The apparent universality of the tragic and the apparent specificity of the comic"[2] are to be reconsidered, thought through and pondered over. It goes without saying that tragedy arouses "pity and fear",[3] pity for the afflictions of others and fear lest the same fate should befall us. With comedy, catharsis is achieved by and reflected through a homoeopathic response just as it is set in motion through tragedy.[4] Just as tragedy holds people together in grief, so does comedy bringing them together in shared delights[5] by holding others up for contempt, among other techniques. Be it through weeping or laughing, both the tragic and comedic achieve the same effect, that is, "the purification of the passions they arouse".[6] Both "produce a commonality and a community,

however transient, and…perform an expiatory role in social behavior"[7] that are very much sought and seldom found. We revel in the comic which "inevitably seems to return full circle, to become, once again,"[8] sugarcoated tragedy we wallow in unaware. Once the veil is lifted, comedy "reveals the real tragedies of human existence". [9] "The comic premise", as is commonly known, fills "the gap between comic reality and real reality".[10] The gaps the premise fills up center on conflicts, "and the deeper the conflict gets, the more interesting the premise becomes",[11] so is the case for tragedy where conflict is inevitable. The difference underlying the two genres lies in the ending they thrust us into. Bakhtin asserts that "humour constitutes a second reality outside the official realm".[12] He goes on to add that this too multilayered a system of meanings whose final expression is laughter exists "alongside and in opposition to the 'authoritarian word' of dominant orthodoxy".[13] As for tragedy, its final expression is best caught in tears, heart-wrenching emotions and empathy for the fate of the tragic hero whose flaw could be ours because of our shared humanity.

Why do *homo sapiens* or rather *homo ridens*, laughing beings, experience sudden outbursts, outpourings and explosions of laughter? Despite lacking in solemnity, humour should be approached with serenity and seriousness[14] though it is acknowledged that humour loses much in the process. Taken seriously, humour can turn out to be hazardous "to those in power precisely because it is a means by which to remove the veil and expose the emperor's empty wardrobe".[15] Approaches exculpating[16] and making light of humour fall flat failing to see that behind the benign, the absurd, lies draped and couched a measure of truth and ambivalence nowhere to be found and excused. Whether truthful or not, "laughter embraced and carried away everyone; nobody could resist it".[17]

In the literature of humour, three rudimentary theories can be readily discerned: The superiority theory[18] ascribes laughter to feelings of superiority we hold towards others we think inferior, not to say infirm. In laughing out loud about the mishaps of others, we treat them very

much like children, and ourselves as grown-ups.[19] In psychoanalytical terms, we look at a despicable and disdainful alter ego with our condescendingly, superciliously and disproportionately inflated ego. The passion of laughter, as Hobbes states, is nothing but an inadvertent self-worth "arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves"[20] hardly found in others. In Aristotle's words, comedy is "an imitation of characters of a lower type",[21] a mimetic parody of a lowly breed. In specific terms, through this display of mimicry, the mimic is said to be the bearer of an indelible anxiety for such a "discourse paradoxically requires the 'native' to be both entirely Other and also 'almost the same', both incapable of being civilized and also fully available for domestication".[22] That "mimicry is ambivalent, continually producing splitting, excess, and difference", if not schizophrenia, empowers it to undermine "the authority of the very discourse that is mimicked".[23] The comic transpires as the derisive and delirious, the ridiculous and ludicrous, but not quite so. The ambivalence of such laughter resides in its ability to assert and deny, bury and revive for "it is gay and triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding."[24] The ideal and the real, the spiritual and the material, the heavenly and the earthly are grotesquely upturned and capsized in keeping with the maxim that "laughter degrades and materializes".[25] Degradation should not be understood as being all annihilating and nihilistic. What cannot be cured cannot be endured and has to be hurled down "to the reproductive lower stratum"[26] to conceive, procreate, and regenerate.

The relief theory looks at laughter as being an overflow and discharge of negative energy.[27] Détente theorists presuppose a direct link between "inner emotional states" and "observable physiological reactions".[28] As mono-directional as it is reducing laughter to external factors, such a flimsy theory fails to probe into the reasons why the same phenomena may trigger laughter in some but not others. There is more to laughter than the physiological world we inscribe it into. Humour is the end-product of an experienced misalignment between

"what we know or expect to be the case, and what actually takes place".[29] Hutcheson's theory of incongruity stands in contrast with the Hobbesian theory of superiority. For Hutcheson, instead of reconfirming the status quo, laughter serves as "a form of debunkery, a deflation of false grandeur",[30] of superiority and self-delusion. On the same plane of thought, Schopenhauer puts laughter on a par with "the suddenly perceived incongruity between a concept and the real objects it had been thought through".[31] "Humour", Weaver elucidates, "is experienced when we perceive incongruous elements, such as the experience of the unexpected" or the [mis]placement of two objects or entities together that do not tick tock.[32] "The illogical juxtaposition" and baffling conjunction or, perhaps I should say, disjunction of "two events, ideas, values, perspectives",[33] the [f]actual and its [mis]representation or "between expectation and actuality",[34] is what induces roars of laughter, so to speak, by flouting and breaching "the normal, expected and mundane".[35] To assume that all laughter is infallibly the result of some incongruity of some sort[36] is to miss the mark. Laughter may be deliberate, if not premeditated, aiming at destabilising that which is taken for granted.

The power jest is invested with in being able to deceive for a while before the illusions it is built upon are dissipated[37] and dispelled is worth taking note of. As Critchley puts it, through mere jocular power and prowess, "humour defeats our expectations by producing a novel actuality",[38] a reality we may not acquiesce in but one we can grin, giggle, smirk, snigger, snicker, smile and laugh with/at. The power of humour lies not simply in its capacity to liberate and elevate the fettered soul from utter depravity to fully-fledged and blown humanity, but also in the potential it carries of bringing about "a change of situation, a surrealization of the real"[39] in a serialisation of the quotidian. Consensual social contracts are rewritten, rules/roles irreverently transgressed in a reevaluation of, not to say revolution against, pervasive and prevalent norms. Actually, "what makes a thing funny is how it impacts the generally held beliefs of the audience" at the receiving end of the joke.[40] The risk inherent in transgressive

humour is that it might "not expect or even desire a change, for then the fun would end."[41] No sooner does humour become didactic than it ceases to be. Humour is not only a social outcome, but an outlet critiquing the established order from an insider's point-of-view. Not all humour is critical of well established institutions. Most of it "simply seeks to reinforce consensus"[42] and when touching on the hierarchisation of societies, it does so in so benign a guise it confers only pleasure and "transient relief".[43] A human condition, "humour might be said to be one of the conditions for taking up a critical position with respect to what passes for everyday life, producing a change in our situation which is both liberating and elevating".[44] Humour does not happen in a vacuum but is well dependent for its being and coming into being on contexts which largely enrich its content, contexts it interrogates in its turn. In order to apprehend and comprehend its depth, Hopfl suggests putting it back into context.[45] Douglas argues that "the joke form rarely lies in the utterance alone, but that it can be identified in the total social situation"[46] from which it initially derives and on which it eventually comments. This commentary, we like to think, targets distinct others we poke fun at to reassure ourselves of our common humanity and "blunt the threats implicit in differences",[47] in otherness.

"By laughing at power, we expose its contingency",[48] its effects and defects not so much by offering an alternative but by ushering the spectatorship to picture an alternate world devoid of specters, sometimes "at odds with our normal way of viewing things".[49] "To satirize life and institutions is to believe in a better mode of conduct"[50] which people fail to live up to, and humor may serve as a gentle and sometimes bitter or angry corrective. Directed at those laughed at, laughter is, as Bakhtin states, also "directed at those who laugh".[51] It tears off and up the mask; "it is the king's uncrowning".[52] Not all humour is corrective of abuse, though. Sexist humour is one such exemplum where members of an ethnic group are invited only to be jettisoned and turned into laughing-stocks.[53] Foreigners are funny[54] and ethnicities are far funnier. "Such humour", Critchely comments, "is not laughter at power, but the powerful

laughing at the powerless",[55] who end up at the butt of the joke. This type of reactionary humour, at its worst, does little more than confirm and conform with the manufactured "social consensus",[56] the coercive consent, and hence needs to be discarded in favour of a truer humour. Its truth lies in describing to us "who we are and the sort of place we live in" and in prescribing how this might change.[57] This humour is nothing numinous but simply luminous with a side to it said to be redemptive and therapeutic,[58] capable of bringing "human beings back from what they have become to what they might be".[59] The extraordinary thing about humour is that it plunges us ineluctably headlong into our deepest recesses by bringing forth our many amorphous faces and vices. Behavioural and attitudinal patterns attracting little or no attention resurge and resurface by virtue of "a new catalyst"[60] – humour.

Notes and References

[1] Most tragedies have survived up to this day and continue to inspire pathos. One need merely mention in passing a few works of Shakespeare's: *Othello: The Moor of Venice*, *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Mcbeth*. However, one cannot forget a comedy like *Midsummer Night's Dreams* which still attracts theatre directors.
[2] Heather hopfl, "Humour and Violation", p. 36. In Robert Westwood and Carl Rhodes, eds., *Humour, Work and Organisation*. New York: Routledge, 2007.
[3] Ibid, p. 37.
[4] Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, p. 252, tr. William Weaver. London: Secker & Warburg, 1983.
[5] Heather hopfl, "Humour and Violation", p. 39. In Robert Westwood and Carl Rhodes, eds., *Humour, Work and Organisation*. New York: Routledge, 2007.
[6] Ibid, p. 38.
[7] Ibid, p. 39.
[8] Damian P. O'Doherty, "Heidegger's unfunny and the academic text",p.184. In Robert Westwood and Carl Rhodes, eds., *Humour, Work and Organisation*. New York: Routledge, 2007.
[9] Antonio Savorelli, *Beyond Sitcom: New Directions in American Television Comedy*, p.6. USA: Mcfarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2010.
[10] John Vorhaus, *The Comic Toolbox: How to be funny even if you're not*, p. 19. Los Angeles: Sliman-James Press, 1994.
[11] Ibid, p. 23.
[12] Pam Morris ed., *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov*, p. 194. Great Britain: Glossary Edward Arnold Ltd, 1994.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Simon Weaver, *The Rhetoric of Racist Humour: US, UK and Global Race Joking*, p. 2. Great Britain: MPG Books Group, 2011. In Representing the Unrepresentable, Allanah Johnston et al speak of "the potential absurdity of taking humour seriously"p. 113. In Robert Westwood and Carl Rhodes, eds., *Humour, Work and Organisation*. New York: Routledge, 2007.
[15] Allanah Johnston et al, "Representing the Unrepresentable", p. 153. In Robert Westwood and Carl Rhodes, eds., *Humour, Work and Organisation*. New York: Routledge, 2007.
[16] Simon Weaver, *The Rhetoric of Racist Humour: US, UK and Global Race Joking*, p. 8. Great Britain: MPG Books Group, 2011.

[17] Pam Morris ed., *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov*, p. 209. Great Britain: Glossary Edward Arnold Ltd, 1994.
[18] Simon Critchlry, *On Humour: Thinking in Action*, p.2. London and New York: Routledge, 2006.
[19] Ibid, p.96.
[20] Wallace Chafe, *The Importance of Not Being Earnset: The feeling behind laughter and humor*, p. 141. USA: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007.
[21] Aristotle, *The Poetics*, p. 11 trans. S. H. Butcher. Easy read Comfort Edition, 2006.
[22] Stephanie Newell, *West African Literatures: Ways of Reading*, p. 51. USA: Oxford University Press Inc: New York, 2006.
[23] Ibid, p. 52.
[24] Pam Morris, ed., *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov*, p. 200. Great Britain: Glossary Edward Arnold Ltd, 1994.
[25]Ibid, p. 206.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Simon Critchley, *On Humour: Thinking in Action*, p.3. London and New York: Routledge, 2006. Herbert Spencer was one of the first theorist to have written a treatise on humour. He has an interesting example illustrating this outbreak of nervous energy: Imagine an audience watching a play and just when the characters are about to reconcile, a goat wanders on stage. I will leave you to imagine the rest.
[28] Michael Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour*, p.176. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2005.
[29] Simon Critchley, *On Humour: Thinking in Action*, p.3. London and New York: Routledge, 2006.
[30] Terry Eagleton, *Trouble with Strangers: A Study of Ethics*, p.34. UK: Wiley and Blackwell, 2009.
[31] Schopenhauer, *In Every Case*, Vol I, Section 13
[32] Simon Weaver, *The Rhetoric of Racist Humour: US, UK and Global Race Joking*, p. 18. Great Britain: MPG Books Group, 2011.
[33] Robert Westwood, "Theory as Joke", p. 49. In Robert Westwood and Carl Rhodes, eds., *Humour, Work and Organisation*. New York: Routledge, 2007.
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Ibn Rumi in City Slums: Celebration in Festive Theatre

Abdeladim Hinda

Abstract

This article presents the analysis of *Ibn Rumi in City Slums* (1976), a play written by Abdelkrim Berchid, a Moroccan dramatist. In this sense, it seeks to unravel the play's festive lineaments in addition to its festive message. Through this article, the turn to Arab-Muslim narrative-performative stances which took places in the 1970s is highlighted. That is, the narrative-performative stance characteristic of festive theatre practice is examined in order to dwell on the aesthetic and epistemological orientations of Moroccan theatre in the 1970s. In a nutshell, the play is assessed on the basis of a historical and epistemological correlative.

Keywords: Festive Theatre, Tradition, Modernity, Celebration, Narration

Abdelkrim Berchid wrote *Ibn Rumi in City Slums* even before the publication of the First Manifesto of Festive Theatre in 1976,[1] and published it in 1978. He says:

> Any healthy understanding of any dramatic work cannot be achieved in the absence of its main sources and springs. The play *Ibn Rumi in City Slums* – which is a dramatic work reposed on a different philosophy as well as new techniques, and on defiant diligences in the field of drama structuring – cannot be interpreted unless one returns to festive thinking.[2]

He also says that the play is clearly an embodiment of the concepts of realistic festivity: the play delves into the depth of Arab mentality to show its theoretical foundations, be they hidden or manifest. It also delves into the consciousness and unconsciousness of the characters who manifest themselves in their dreams, mental conceptions as well as delusions. It delves into the

materialistic spirit of the Arab man reflected in his passion and love. It abbreviates all Arab times –the past, the present and the future – within a little temporal space.[3] This article is concerned with unraveling the festive lineaments in the play as well as its festive message.

Introducing Ibn Rumi to his spectators, Ibn Danyal says:

> Gentlemen! Lend me your eyes and your ears. I'm not a historian, nor am I a tutor of boys. Every analogy in history is but a mere agreement or coincidence. Ibn Rumi whom I have drawn and whom I'm going to relate about is not the poet you know, the poet who was born in Baghdad. The poet of tonight, my gentlemen, could be from Paris, Rome, or Casablanca; he could be Ali the son of Abbas or the poet Lorca. He could be al-Mejdoub or Bablo Niroda. He could be you, or you, or you. Who knows? He may be … or he may be…![4]

In Berchid's judgment, this introduction is very "crucial for the specification of the nature of the characters, events and attitudes pertaining to this dramatic work."[5] He adds that "Ibn Rumi is a character from history, but is also not from history."[6] Yet,

> The play's events are in the last analysis a chemical synthesis comprised of different and various elements. It is because of this that the element of history dissolves in reality, dream and phantasm to form a new reality, which is neither actual nor historical, but is rather a composite theatrical reality with its specific laws, dimensions and space. Inside this space the characters engage in dialogues and in struggles; and they are characters belonging in the first place to Man and his issues.[7]

Ibn Rumi is thus established as a universal citizen.

Ibn Rumi is a living being, who grows and develops. His state of affairs together with his attitudes change as a result of his interactive relationships with the outside world. The play does not start from a ready-made idea it aims to transmit to the recipient. In this sense, "a performance comes into being only during its course. It arises from the interaction of performers and spectators," [8] that is to say "due to the inherent in-betweenness of performance."[9]

The play is a grave trip in the fields of Arabic thinking and reality, which are synopsized in the play within a limited time. Time in the play has to do with all Arabic times and so does the place. Yet Berchid asserts that:

> I do not call for the employment and treatment of tradition because our tradition exists within our Selves. Tradition has nothing to do with 'the yellow books' as it relates to us. It relates to language, thinking, mentality, soul and history which has known continuity and has never been discontinuous. In this sense, the past has forevermore been present in 'the now' together with its human instances whose presence is marked by continuity, too.[10]

In this context, the odalisque Arib represents the entire history of the Arab woman. Though she changes time and place, she remains an odalisque:

> ***Arib***: I'm the odalisque Arib.
>
> They raised me in the field of whoredom.
>
> They taught me how to spawn pleasure and invent songs…
>
> I was a dancer in Baikal
>
> Denuding myself at nights
>
> The eye of men was stinging…whipping…burying me in its depth.

> I was an actress in Broadway,
>
> Each night dying once.
>
> My price? [*She sarcastically laughs*] Applause when I excel at death and whoredom.
>
> I die and the curtain falls.
>
> I was a fashion exhibitor in Paris.
>
> You see me in the markets barefooted and uncovered,
>
> And in posters and pictures.
>
> You see me like a peafowl swanking in colors, the shiny colors…
>
> I'm Arib the odalisque. I'm known to the slave traders of Baghdad and Cairo and …to the drunkard in Beirut…and to the middlemen too.[11]

The play in this sense does not summon up the past just to resurface again, but to interpret it rather. Nor does it regard it as an inert thing lacking both existence in and touch with the current moment. Quite the contrary, the past and the present form a unity in the play: Ibn Rumi along with his neighbors and friends –who belong to the past –reappear again in the present time. It follows that "the play in essence is a serious endeavor intended to quest for the real Arabic time, which can make two things attainable: *al-hadata* [modernity] and *al-mo'asara* [contemporariness]."[12] Berchid further argues that "since we carry the past within our Selves, we inevitably tend to experience self-destruction or internal destruction; and it is this very particular destruction that Ibn Rumi faces. He starts from inner combustion to come out of his ashes cleaner and purer, and freer and more active."[13]

Ibn Rumi is an exemplary instance of the festive man. He loves life in all its aspects, both corporeal and incorporeal. Since the love of things entails protecting and defending them, Ibn Rumi has thus become, by necessity, a struggler. At the beginning, he seems to be satisfied

with confronting the negative voices issuing from his mind, his unconscious, and his tired nervous system. These voices promote dread, anxiety, pessimism, seclusion, capitulation, suicide, etc. Berchid maintains here that "the modest triumph of Ibn Rumi at the end of the play could be interpreted as a major step to what lies ahead because –as he is now preparing to face the outside – he will be a united voice after he has been a plethora of clashing voices."[14]

Ibn Rumi is a compulsive fighter. Though he seems to be struggling against everything around him, he does not seem to be conscious of that struggle. More than that, we see him dying time and again as if to emphasize the festive concepts of struggle and death which by necessity generate "resurrection, renewal and continuity."[15] It is in light of this festive notion of death and struggle that the play comes to an end: Ibn Rumi is combusted completely to give room to another person to rise in his place, yet a person endowed with a new spirit and eyes. He says:

> Yes! It's the first time that I feel I'm alive, and I breathe, and I see. Get closer! Get closer, O you in whose looks I read what is in the heart. Your hearts are clean; I see them hanged on the washing line….[16]

It is in this spirit of renewal that he says to his neighbors: "[*To Arib*] I will go into the markets of Baghdad to bring you the anklet. [*To the others*] My brothers say farewell to me, or see me off for I may or may not return. Who knows?"[17] He goes into the market, which is a symbol that denotes human gatherings driven by exploitation, monopoly, injustice, inequity and every other relationship that stifles life and deforms the humanity of the human. Yet this will inevitably drive him to struggle against death for he highly values life. In other words, his act of going into the market is an act of rebirth.

Ibn Rumi is a man who interprets the world around him in view of the philosophy of the popular man. His understanding of concepts is colored by this philosophy. He relates

between a star in the sky and the lots of people in the Earth and between seeing a hunchbacked man and evil that might befall him:

> Did you read your luck today, sir? Of course, not. Otherwise, you wouldn't have said what you said…listen [*he reads*] you'll lose a beloved one due to a misfortune afflicting you because of a crookbacked man….you're the cause! I should have known this before….. O you Dabal, it is in your back that I see my ill-being and that of Baghdad… in your face I read the curse of the Heaven.[18]

He is the offspring of exploitation or the product of disorder of distribution, which is "a curse from Heaven. A curse special to me alone, and has nothing to do with you. Get away lest you be infected."[19] He does not ascribe things to their original causes, nor does he premise his inferences on reason. He seems to think and act according to what has already been entrenched in his head due to social acquisitions, including political institutions embodied by the servant Ya-Zaman:

> The City Council does not want much from you; just a few lines of poetry, lines describing the poor neighborhood together with its wretched inhabitants. You believe in misery. Don't you? You believe that your troubles come from these dirty cottages, from Da'bal, from Issa, from Achaab, and from all the paupers and the homeless. Ibn Rumi, this is your chance to say goodbye to misery for good.[20]

He is propelled by these socio-political institutions to spread mythical thinking in a bid to justify exploitation, impoverishment, ignorance and un-education. This production of docility is also very visible in Ibn Rumi's neighbors' trial of Da'bal:

> Issa: You who lack beauty sell it to people?
>
> Jahda: when did this monster appear?

> Issa: Didn't you know, the crookbacked Da'bal, that all of Ibn Rumi's trouble today have come from your swollen back?
>
> Jahda: and the poverty of Baghdad …and the years of dryness and locust…
>
> Issa: Everything from you has erupted…O you the evil portent of Baghad.[21]

Though being a victim, Da'bal becomes a culprit in the scales of mythical convention propagated by statecraft. Yet Da'bal is conscious of this. He says:

> Nay! O you the dwellers of this neighborhood, evil portent is but a mere talk, while misfortune is but a mere superstition. I am like yourselves, one of the paupers, a victim! How come therefore I become the executioner? How come? How come O you the angels of the Merciful that my hunch spawns the misfortune of Baghdad? How come, knowing that the crookbacked Da'bal has been formed in a meager womb? Always threatened by hunger, poverty and sickness? I inherited my hunch from Baghdad which distributed yet didn't do justice. …I'm not an evil portent to Baghdad, but Baghdad is an evil portent to me, and to the deformed, the blind, the paupers and the castrated![22]

Ibn Rumi is unable to act and move because he is a prisoner of his special view of the world around him. This view did not originate in his head due to a conscious free choice, but found a way into his head as it did into those of others thanks to the efforts of different official institutions. This view is very feudalist and determinist in nature as it promises the absurdity and insignificance of human action. Aristotle pointed out that the process of philosophizing always starts with 'surprise.' Ibn Rumi appears to the audience at the beginning of the play as a child who has just come into this world. Everything around him is surprising, frightful, wild, dirty, deformed and illogical. He reads a theatrical dialogue to the audience:

- O you who stand like wax idols, what're you doing?

- We stare at the sun…
- Now, tell me. Did the slates breathe in whispers? Did they appear and become visible after yesterday's abandonment? [*Silence. He changestone*] complete silence then black darkness followed with the curtain's fall…the play has ended [*he puts the book aside*]. Alif. Laam. Jeem. Yaa: letters? What do they conceal? Do I have to open the door, or not? Do I have to? I don't know.[23]

Ibn Rumi's thinking is suspended between affirmation and negation: "Do I have to open the door or not."[24] In his hesitation, he makes us feel as if he were both himself and the other. He prefers "going inside" instead of "going outside:" He "goes into" his Self in lieu of going out into Baghdad. Besides, instead of realizing things, he tends to make them: he is a poet endowed with a flair for imagination, which constitutes a source of his living yet also a source of his misery. He makes the impossible possible, the absent present, and the far near. He imagines things and becomes a prisoner of these imaginations. In a sense, he is a prisoner within himself and within his community. Berchid maintains that "Ibn Rumi's character cannot be specified in words for he in the main represents situations from existence which are in a constant flux….It is because of this that Ibn Rumi does nothing but contradicts himself throughout the play."[25] Issa observes this trait of character in Ibn Rumi: "believing you is not enough for your stance is the offspring of a situation, an ephemeral situation. All your stances are built by particular psychological situations to be destroyed by others."[26] Jahda adds, "He is like the sky that clouds over once," "and brightens another time," completes Da'bal. Ibn Rumi is a person who changes time and again, yet this change happens in relation to an immutable pivot: "I want to live. Don't I have the right to live like other people?"[27] He lives and lives in the midst of people: he pockets his money and goes to the brothel in quest of love, where he finds his beloved Arib. This shows that he lives with people, not at their expenses.

Ibn Rumi's tragedy stems from his outlook on existence, which prompts his suffering, confusion and anxiety. As the play suggests, his salvation is impossible unless he changes this outlook. In other words, the play demonstrates that change should first start from within to bring about change in real life situations. Ibn Rumi's outlook has many weaknesses: 1) He has forgotten that he –as an individual self –cannot invest himself with importance unless he lives in the heart of the multitude as he is a part in/of a whole; 2) in his analysis of phenomena, he takes the results as premises, a thing that makes facts sound upside down to him, and this adds up largely to his confusion; 3) and though he is a victim in such a feudal-slave society, he consciously or unconsciously turns into an executioner himself: instead of condemning the regime, he wants to support it; though he is a living man, he reduces himself to a mere amount of words for display in the market, which robs him of his humanity and dignity –even the word, which is sacred, is turned into a mere commodity; he sells himself, and with the same price he wants to buy others (Arib). In this sense, the concept of exploitation in the play has nothing to do with the duality of classicism. In Berchid's play, exploitation takes a pyramidal form: the exploited (Ibn Rumi) exerts exploitation on the exploited (Arib). At the top of the pyramid we find Baghdad's Head of Commerce, while at the bottom we find the odalisque Arib together with those at the whorehouse. Yet Arib refuses to build a master-slave relationship with Ibn Rumi who instead of looking at her as a woman "excelling at recital, singing and poetry….and the art of passion,"[28] is now convinced that she is a human being who has exactly the same social status and conditions of existence; 4) his view of home is unhealthy, too: he has changed his home into a prison, a thing that adds up to the explanation of his upside-down concepts. Though he believes he is a life-loving person, he stifles life at home; and 5) that his conviction that the world outside his door's keyhole is deformed, cruel and horrible. Instead of making this insight an impetus for changing this world, he just tends to be internally satisfied with

rejecting it. Ibn Rumi's attitudes and outlook remain suspended between confusion and denial until Arib comes to his rescue.

He regards the tin town as a pandemic evil. In this, he is in agreement with his neighbors. Yet his approach to eradicating it differs from theirs: he aligns himself with Baghdad's Bourgeois political authority embodied in the City Alderman (head of commerce) who wants to destroy the neighborhood and build in its place beautiful and gigantic buildings and eventually 'mortgage' the country to international powers. This is in truth another form of slavery whereas an entire neighborhood throbbing with innocent lives is placed under the mercy of auctioning in exchange for dollars. This is an act of materializing human life expressed by the servant Ya-Zaman:

> The City Council has decided to demolish this neighborhood. Ibn Rumi, don't worry about your house. You'll have what is better. These wretched cottages will be changed into a gigantic building for sightseeing to which rich tourists will come from Nisabor, Jorson, Fes and Sikiliya. All types of currency will bombard it. Do you know that?[29]

Yet the poor dwellers of the slums look at their homes from completely human perspectives: they want to create a clean and decent neighborhood. When they express their strong clinging to this neighborhood, they do not mean that they like wretchedness and poverty. But, this act of clinging to dilapidated homes is an outcry against the bourgeois methods of human objectification. They say that they are not commodity for sale. Though Ibn Rumi is one of these disfranchised dwellers, he does not work for their advantage/welfare because those who are 'above,' knowing his insatiability, make use of him. They secretly offer him presents and gifts and commission him to portray the slums in the worst possible light in a bid to drive the dwellers out.

However, Ibn Rumi's conscience awakens at last and refuses to cave to this bourgeois demeaning act of objectification of human life. He therefore abandons his dreams, and changes his outlook. More than that, he decides to go outside instead of staying inside and committing class-struggle suicide, and clings to his neighbors and prevents them from leaving the neighborhood:

> Da'bal: I will leave as I promised you.
>
> Ibn Rumi: no, you'll stay. I fear for your safety from the outdoors. I'm scared of the hold of middlemen. You will stay! Everybody will stay, and let the servant Ya-Zaman go to Hell.[30]

The servant Ya-Zaman is but a go-between who conveys to him instructions from 'above.'

Berchid's play depends upon "a composite structure: a structure manifested in several contradictious levels: reality, the shade of the shadow, truth, dream, conscience, unconscious, the present, the past, the here, the there."[31] He reduces these to two main levels: reality and the box of the shadow maker.[32] At the level of reality, the events take place in a shanty town, while at the level of the magic box of the shadow puppeteer, the events take place within the box of Ibn Danyal and Danyazard. In this sense, the events and relationships cannot be interpreted from one single vantage. For example, the narrator changes and so do the characters' stances: Ibn Danyal presents Arib as a woman worried about her reflection of physical beauty in the eyes of men, yet Danyazard rejects this image of Arib and propounds a new image: "Father, let me show you the new Arib; you'll see her as if you've never seen her before!"[33] Ibn Rumi's image also changes in this regard: Hamdan protests against Ibn Danyal's image of Ibn Rumi: "The Ibn Rumi you have presented does not resemble me, sir!"[34] Saadan adds, "It is for this reason that we object to your art."[35] Danyazard, too, says that "I object to your art, too, Father."[36]

In Berchid's Festive Theatre, creativity originates from the womb of the current instant. It is this artistic characheristic that we observe in *Ibn Rumi in City Slums*: everything is formed before and with the help of the audience. Here, Fischer-Lichte correctly observes that a performance "course cannot be entirely planned or predicted" due to its "inherent in-betweenness." [37] She adds that "performances rely on autopoietic processes involving participants, performers, and spectators alike and are characterized by a high degree of contingency."[38] She further adds that:

> The exact course of a performance cannot be foreseen at its beginning. Even if performers set the decisive preconditions for the progression of a performance – preconditions that are determined by a set of rules or the process of the *mise en scène*, they are not in a position to fully control the course of the performance. Many elements emerge during a performance as a consequence of certain interactions. In other words, over its course a performance creates the possibility for all the participants to experience themselves as a subject that can co-determine the actions and behavior of others and whose own actions and behavior are similarly determined by others. The individual participants – be they performers or spectators – experience themselves as subjects that are neither fully autonomous nor fully determined by others; subjects that accept responsibility for a situation which they have not created but which they participate in.[39]

In this sense, nothing in the play is 'fixed' or 'final.' Rather, everything in the play is subject to change. This is so because the element of surprise plays a fundamental role in festivity, and more than that plays an instigative role: when Ibn Danyal finishes his task of provoking the audience to challenge the official act of destroying the neighborhood, and starts to push his carriage back, his daughter stops him:

> Ibn Danyal: Danyazard! Where're you going, my daughter?
>
> Danyazard: where am I going? Going where these people are going!
>
> Ibn Danyal: Yet we don't belong to them. We're from another world.
>
> Danyazard: Father, you're mistaken! There's but one world and one city…the word that lacks movement is completely fake, exactly like a dime without value. Our existence in this city and our suffering are things we cannot jump over. Come, Father….the suffering of the poor has never been an entertaining spectacle…and will never be….come.[40]

If it is Ibn Danyal who has controlled the shaping of Ibn Rumi's relationship with his neighbors at the beginning of narration, it is now Danyazard who has interfered to reshape this relationship as she has discovered that her father's narratives do not respond to the audience's preoccupations. He admits, "I don't know the language of this generation…..it's for this reason that I leave narration to my daughter….my daughter, narrate to them."[41] Though Ibn Danyal is presented in the play as "the sheikh of the shadow puppeteers,"[42] he seems unable to dispose of illusion and move into reality. He is therefore the first representation of illusion-reality duality of festivity, while Danyazard manifests the second representation of this duality. Ibn Danyal fails to mobilize the audience against the demolition act, while Danyazard partakes in the demonstration against this act. This very act of taking part is to be regarded as a festive counter-act for resisting forms of injustice and oppression. I observe that Danyazard's act is very similar to Chahrazad's in *One Thousand and One Nights* in which Chahrazad puts her life at stake by distracting her father in a bid to save girls like herself. In the play, Danyazard too puts her life in danger by stepping out of the world of her father whom Saadan and Redwan accuse saying: "you have been etherizing us with songs and narratives like children;" "let's turn a blind eye on …and our life remains as it is ..."[43]

Berchid's play sheds light on a number of issues: 1) the suffering of slum dwellers together with the concomitant social and economic injustice having to do with destroying their houses; and 2) the relationship between intellectuals (the poet) and authority (the city council), which is characterized by subjugation and dominance. Berchid has successfully discussed these issues using the festive aesthetic framework, which comprises two styles here: narration and struggle of characters. Narration is embodied by Ibn Danyal and Danyazard. The dramatist returns to the 'yellow books' to revive or retrieve the wonderful style of Ibn Danyal (storytelling) which gives us "light"[44] /knowledge. Yet Danyazard opts for modern narration. It is for this reason that she rejects her father's method of narration. She refuses to comply with the methods of storytelling of the classics because she belongs to the modern age. As to the struggle of characters, it is governed according to the dialectic of reality and acting: Ibn Danyal's struggle with the stage hand; Mkadem and his acolytes' struggle with the neighborhood dwellers; Ibn Rumi's struggle with his neighbors; and Rabab's struggle with her odalisques.

To delineate these types of struggle, the dramatist has had recourse to a number of contradictions with which reality is replete and which can be reduced to the contradiction between poverty and wealth. It is in this particular framework where reality together with its mode of social, political and emotional relationships are treated. Here, the element of acting plays a fundamental role in exposing these contradictions along with their psychological reflections: (Arib and Ibn Rumi's master-odalisque relationship). Yet criticism is the tool fashioned by the dramatist to expound and examine these issues of reality: 1) Da'bal, Issa and Jahda's critique of Ibn Rumi; 2) Arib's critique of Ibn Rumi; 3) the neighborhood elites' critique of authority; and 4) Danyazard's critique of the neighborhood elites. The festive view of criticism here has to do with exposing anti-change attitudes, which are manifested clearly in critiquing Ibn Rumi who has praised the president of the city council and got a package of gold

as a reward for his support of the demolition act. Berchid here touches upon thinker-authority relationship by means of his deployment of face-mask (or truth-fakeness) duality. Before his transformation, Ibn Rumi seems to represent the intellectual who fakes the actual reality of his neighbors in a bid to curry favor with the city council. The mask game is played by Ibn Danyal, Ibn Rumi, Da'bal, Issa, and Jahda, who represent, in Danyazard's eyes, the symbolic equivalent of real characters: Ridwan, Saadan and Hamdan. She says:

> Gentlemen! The Baghdad in the narrative is not the Baghdad you know…and Da'bal, Jahda, Issa, Ibn Rumi and Arib….all these names are but masks behind which human exemplary instances from this neighborhood, from this city, hide.[45]

In brief, Berchid's message is that Baghdad's old situation is today's situation of contemporary cities.

Time in the play oscillates between the past and the present. The past is embodied in Ibn Danyal and Danyazard, while the present in the other characters. Time is not an absolute concept in the play. Nor is it abstract. It is marked with values that are theatrically capable of treatment in the present. The play juxtaposes these values to show that these values (whoredom for example) continue to exist in our present life. Yet the place has to do with the performance space. Danyazard says, "Gentlemen, the Baghdad in the narrative is not the Baghdad you know…;"[46] Ibn Danyal adds, "yes, it is this neighborhood, another version of your city [*He mentions the city in which the play is being performed*]."[47] I think that the end behind using Baghdad as a place in which the play's events take place is to create the festive harmony between tradition and modernity and between reality and acting. This shows Berchid's compliance with festivity's theatrical and dramatic principles: here he chooses the square of Baghdad as an open space of performance and places al-hakawati (Ibn Danyal) in its middle to narrate past stories to his spectators. This technique has afforded the dramatist a chance to

completely dispose of dramatic classical rules, which treat the place as a fixed framework in which the movement of characters and events is frozen. In other words, Berchid here transcends the classical view of the dramatic place (the theatrical building) to endorse *assaha* (the square) as an aesthetic place of performance denoting productive difference. Indeed, the play finds in *assaha* the alternative open space serving festivity's demands and responding to Berchid's obsession regarding 'authenticating' Arabic theatre. In festivity, the Arabic square constitutes the basis of aesthetics of a theatre aspiring for innovation and difference. Therefore, moving from the building into the square is a way of returning to tradition, to the open space of performance.

The concept of tradition in the play does not contradict the ideas of modernity for the play returns to 'the yellow books' (the past) to read them from the modernity vantage of ephemerality. That is, the play interweaves tradition and modernity and subjects them both to the force of constant change in a bid to create something new. The play is a product of interweaving. It has both theoretical and denotative dimensions and represents the festive tendency par excellence. Its language is variant, comprehensive and profound: poetry, narratives, singing, music, gestures, movements, lighting, darkness, etc. This linguistic variation explicates the nature of the festive theatrical action, which is very pluralistic and collective: Ibn Rumi's neighbors incorporate Ibn Rumi and his poetry into their cause, while Danyazard instigates her father to join in the demonstration. The play also revives Arabic popular performing spectacles such as al-halqa in which al-hakawati and his acolyte (Ibn Danyal and Danyazard) tell narratives, myths and fictions to their spectators with resort to the direct method of dialogue, characterization and gesture; it revives the Arabic heritage and modernizes it (Danyazard's rejection of her father's manner of narration); it makes use of mockery and irony to observe and examine social, political and cultural phenomena; it also reflects the Arabic obsession for 'authenticating' Arabic theatre by situating it in a productive

liminal interweaving state. The play in this regard is a product of interweaving the East and the West and the past and the present. These entities are without certitudes and are always in flux.

Regarding the play's aesthetic frameworks, it has invented the concepts of lawha [tableau] and nafas [breath]; the dramatic script has adopted 1) the concept of festive movement; 2) the technique of assembling festive tableaux in complete harmony; 3) classical structures yet also modernizing them (arawi; khayal azil, al-hakawati); 4) and has also depended upon the miserable reality technique: the poor, the slums, the oppressed (man and woman), etc. Aesthetically, the play represents innovation and 'productive difference.'

Notes and References

[1] See Abdelkrim Berchid*, hodod al-kain wa lmomkin fi al-masrah al-ihtifali* [The Limits of the Actual and the Possible in Festive Theatre] (dar attaqafa: Casablanca, 1985), p. 184.
[2] Ibid. p. 174.
[3] Ibid. p. 180.
[4] See Abdelkrim Berchid*, Ibn Rumi in City Slums: A Theatrical Celebration in Seventeen Tableaux* (Edisoft Edition, Casablanca, 2010), pp. 22-23.
[5] See*, hodod al-kain wa lmomkin fi al-masrah al-ihtifali*, p. 181
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] See Fischer-Lichte, Erika. 'Interweaving Cultures in Performance: Different States of Being In-Between.' *Textures* (online), August 11, 2010. Web.
[9] Ibid.
[10] See *hodod al-kain wa lmomkin fi al-masrah al-ihtifali*, p. 182.
[11] See the play. Ibid. pp. 31-32.
[12] See *hodod al-kain wa lmomkin fi al-masrah al-ihtifali*, p. 184.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid. p. 93.
[15] Ibid. p. 194.
[16] Ibid. p. 89.
[17] Ibid. p. 91.
[18] Ibid. pp. 81-82.
[19] Ibid. p. 86.
[20] Ibid. pp. 56-57.
[21] Ibid. pp. 50-51.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid. p. 24.
[24] Ibid. pp. 24-25.
[25] Ibid., p. 201.
[26] The play. Ibid. p. 90.
[27] Ibid. p. 82.
[28] Ibid. p. 35.
[29] Ibid. p. 56.
[30] Ibid. p. 90.
[31] See *hodod al-kain wa lmomkin fi al-masrah al-ihtifali*, p. 213.
[32] Ibid. pp. 213-214.

[33] Ibid. p. 70.
[34] Ibid. p. 69.
[35] Ibid. p. 70.
[36] Ibid.
[37] See "Interweaving Cultures in Performance: Different States of Being In-Between."
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] The play. Ibid. p. 95.
[41] Ibid. 92.
[42] Ibid. p. 8.
[43] Ibid. 92.
[44] Ibid. p. 11.
[45] Ibid. pp. 92-93.
[46] Ibid. p. 92.
[47] Ibid.

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Time, Place and the Confusion of Both: Redefining Modernism in Selected Works of Tony Morrison and Virginia Woolf

Divya Somani

Abstract

Modernist writers like Woolf and Morrison not only present (or represent) reality but they create a linguistic representation of the inner experiences borne in the modern life and one of those characteristics is the confusion of time and place. This article analyses the narrative technique of Morrison's *Sula* and Woolf's *The Mark on the Wall* which use a language to de-form and de-structure the reader's rational way of thinking where they have to play in the confusion with the writers.

Keywords: confusion, modernity, time, place

On multiple occasions, Morrison has shared her musings on language and its functionality. She holds the opinion that one needs to create a method of expression if one finds that there are no pre-existing means by which they can successfully express a story that needs to be told. Her views depict a certain sense of reverence towards the power of language. Furthermore, her perspective puts into question the impact structuring, de-structuring, and restructuring has on literary expression. In a similar spirit, Woolf has described writers as being constrained by some 'unscrupulous tyrant' that insists upon there being elements such as a 'love interest, tragedy, comedy' and the like in a novel. Her contention lies in her question: 'Is life like this?' (*Modern Fiction* 189). All the contents of this essay in one way or another tie back to this question. This essay will attempt to explore Toni Morrison's *Sula* and Virginia Woolf's *The*

Mark on the Wall within the broader trends and narratives of literary modernism. Both Woolf and Morrison mark a distinct break from convention in terms of language, structure and form. By this framework of reasoning, both Morrison and Woolf are revolutionary in the manner in which they tread the grounds of that which is otherwise unsaid, unheard of or unmentionable.

RATIONALITY

Morrison and Woolf's works, in many senses, go beyond what is rational or reasonable. The characters in *Sula* and the trajectory of thoughts in *The Mark on the Wall* do not fit the normative definition of rationality. Reading Morrison is an unsettling experience because it defies rationality, in particular by blurring the lines between the ordinary and the extraordinary. In the midst of fun and frolic Sula's young friend Chicken Little accidently drowns because of her mistake (Morrison 60-61). Lighting the yard fire, an action which she probably did on a regular basis, ends up burning Hannah, Sula's mother, to death in the most painful and ghastly mishap (Morrison 75-78). In *Sula,* Death, hence, is always deprived from a logical causality. An overarching trend in the novel is to treat death not as something separate from life but as an everyday experience that coexists with other mundane occurrences. Even in the manner in which Sula reacts to her older white and male bullies or to her mother, Hannah, burning to death there is a certain unsettling sense that arises when something lacks logical progression. Sula harms her own self by drawing blood simply to prove a point to the bullies which was that if she was capable of harming herself what could she do to them (Morrison 54-55). Sula, rather than turning away in horror, keenly watched Hannah burn, not because she was in shock but because she was interested. Sula's self-harm and her expression of interest is monumental because it delves into a dark space that shows human beings as deriving a certain sadomasochistic pleasure from brutality and violence. This incident throws light on the largest

fallacy that the rational narrative of human beings' gives birth to- innate goodness within every human.

The Mark on the Wall critiques rationality in the approach it adopts to express the nature of the human phenomenon. The methodology of Woolf's stream of consciousness draws a divide between the objective external reality of the mark on the wall and the subjective psychological reality of the narrator who uses her variegated experience of the mark to reflect on several passing thoughts. The mark on the wall seems to be the pivot that anchors the narrator to external reality. The mark is experienced by the narrator as a 'satisfying sense of reality' (Woolf *The Mark* 9) which she repeatedly returns to after going through one trajectory of thought followed by another. The stability and constancy of the mark should have ideally given it a significant position in the story but ironically enough the mark is completely irrelevant. The mark is irrelevant because a thousand other arbitrary things could have played the same role. Undoubtedly the aforementioned metaphor also holds true for the state of the human experience in the twentieth century.

The Enlightenment and subsequent developments in the intellectual sphere in Europe gave birth to the idea of a human being as a rational and thinking individual. A distinct shift from this perspective can be traced in the twentieth century as a result of the World Wars. Rather than portraying human beings in their greatness or highness, both Woolf and Morrison, following the larger trend of their times, display a great sense of disillusionment with the human condition. One can reason that this was markedly due to the fact that rationalising becomes hugely insufficient when one is to comprehend the magnitude of loss, destruction and tumult that the world experienced in the twentieth century. In a certain way, attempting to understand modernity by rationalising it is like attempting to reach infinity by counting. Morrison and Woolf grapple with that realm of human experience that is not rational but at the same time is very decidedly a part of lived experience. The unconventionality of their forms

and styles can perhaps be attributed to the fact that they were compelled to create a new linguistic computation to understand their experience of life because existing forms were unsuitable.

(DE)FORM AND (DE)STRUCTURE

To study the form and language used by Morrison and Woolf, in a certain sense, is ridden with irony because language itself is developed according to the tenets of rationality where else both authors use language in a manner which helps push its boundaries to realms which it cannot always do justice. If we metaphorically think of the content which any given author wishes to put into words as water, then we can reasonably conceive of forms in terms of various types of containers which would give the water a different shape and quality without altering its original universal essence. The kind of content which Morrison and Woolf grapple with is not well fitted for the water metaphor because it is more obscure and less tangible than water. Both authors grapple with content which can be better understood as air. Since air cannot be contained in the manner in which water can, it has to be represented in a manner which helps ground it, just enough, to make it palpable to our understanding. One would have to add smoke to it or release fragrance into it or maybe even add helium balloons to indicate and channel its presence. Morrison and Woolf grapple with content that is all pervasive and universal but lies on the periphery of our sensory awareness and intellectual understanding.

In the case of *Sula*, this aspect is sufficiently proven in the manner in which Morrison chooses to represent the manner in which the First World War had made death into a mundane daily reality. Shadrack, a soldier who loses his sanity for the rest of his life as a result of the War, was the founder of 'National Suicide Day' (Morrison 14-16). Shadrack was not afraid of death but of the unexpectedness of dying which had become a lived reality as a consequence of the war. The manner in which he chose to grapple with it was assigning one day of the year

which he could devote to dying and killing, thereby falsely exercising a certain control over death. 'National Suicide Day' became a 'part of the fabric of life up in the Bottom' in Medallion, Ohio (Morrison 14-16). Morrison weaves in profound satire in the manner in which she describes people referring to 'National Suicide Day' as any other day of the year. A woman describes her labour pains as having begun on National Suicide Day. A bride-to-be tells her lover that she did not want to get married on 'National Suicide Day' because the cowbells would disturb the wedding. A grandmother says that an old hen started laying double yolks right after Suicide Day (Morrison 14-16). Morrison's works are ridden with metaphors of this kind which are representative of a certain experience of life in her day and age which cannot be told by simply giving an account, summing up a narrative or by recalling certain instances. Morrison is a strong proponent of the belief that language is a move towards the 'ineffable' (Reception Speech) and that it could not and should not believe that it can capture life in its totality. She creates a new style of storytelling to describe the experience of living with death and dehumanisation in such a regular routine way.

Woolf also attempts to put into words a sense of ephemerality and fleeting time wherein arbitrariness reigns supreme and human control over circumstances is illusory. Woolf likens life to being blown through the Tube at fifty miles an hour.

> Why, if one wants to compare life to anything, one must liken it to being blown through the Tube at fifty miles an hour—landing at the other end without a single hairpin in one's hair! Shot out at the feet of God entirely naked! Tumbling head over heels in the asphodel meadows like brown paper parcels pitched down a shoot in the post office! With one's hair flying back like the tail of a race-horse. Yes, that seems to express the rapidity of life, the perpetual waste and repair; all so casual, all so haphazard… (*The Mark* 4)

Time is blurred in the reverie of the narrator because the reader is unaware of how much time has passed between its beginning and end. After all, Woolf directly expresses her thoughts without describing or explaining them. Firstly, there is no clear sense of whether these thoughts are coexisting or follow one after the other. If they take place altogether then presumably the time taken in the reverie would be lesser. Secondly, the thoughts do not arrive at any logical conclusion but rather trail off as is made evident through the ellipses. The ellipses could be representative of any amount of time because one is particularly unsure about what happens in the narrator's mind between the void of one thought and the other or if at all there is a gap between two thoughts. Her reflection resonates exactly the kind of lives people in the Bottom lead: without much care or question no matter how morbid it gets. The manner in which human beings compute time can be read as a human attempt to rationalise mortality. If one is caught by the unawares as far as time is concerned or if one is unable to clearly perceive of time, a certain sense of stability and control is automatically eliminated from the experience of life. If time evades us then life itself evades us. Time, mortality and the occurrence of death in both works is unconventional, lacking causality and beyond the control of any human endeavour. Such is the nature of life itself in the era of modernity.

UNIVERSALITY IN THE PERSONAL

The works of authors like Morrison and Woolf qualify as presentations rather than representations. Their literary stylisation is like the artwork of their contemporaries wherein a message, a sentiment or an experience is symbolically represented. If one attempts to conceive of either Morrison or Woolf's works as an account or an excerpt from their lives, one would only superficially understand their content. *Sula* and *The Mark on the Wall* in spite of belonging to the genres of novel and short story respectively, do not concern themselves with the recapitulation of incidents as much as they do with the representative expression of a certain

state of being. When Toni Morrison wants to depict humiliation she taps deep into the crevices of the human body itself to state in clear cut terms what it means to be black, and second to a human being. Helene was unable to relieve herself at the railway station because after Birmingham there were no restrooms for coloured females. Her face was 'drawn' with the need to 'relieve' herself. Ultimately, she and her daughter, amongst other black women and children were forced to squat in the fields by the tracks in the all subsequent stations (Morrison 23-24). The words of humiliation are never used by Morrison. She uses her language to describe the human body at in its most uncomfortable and basal states and leaves the rest unsaid. Her silence speaks profoundly. The visceral quality of Morrison's expression makes the sentiment and tone of the novel universal. The use of a black language or a woman's language does not alienate but finds a space which is the literary equivalent of infinity wherein the local and the universal are the same.

Modernist storytelling is not about retelling or revisiting an incident as much as it is about creating a linguistic representation of the inner experiences borne in the modern life. For Woolf, the reader is an active participant rather than recipient in the process of storytelling. The form used by Woolf makes her works both alienating and universally understandable because she expresses her thoughts in the raw form in which they occur to her. Unlike the easy comfort of previous literary traditions, the stream of consciousness requires active engagement wherein the reader has to experience not only the story but the content of the story from the repertoire of their own life experiences. Woolf repeatedly likens objects of everyday life to the dust indicating the fact that the dust is the ultimate end for all things dead or alive. 'Opals and emeralds' lie at the 'roots of turnips' (*The Mark* 4) and the 'dust on the mantelpiece is the same that buried Troy three times over' (*The Mark* 5). The universality of death overpowers the alienating effect the complexity of style could possibly have on the reader. Woolf and Morrison write about deeply personal experiences but instead of alienating the reader their works have

the opposite effect. If their works are any a precedent, the personal and universal are synonymous.

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The Grotesqueness of the Empire:

Reading Bodies in *Gulliver's Travels*

Pritika Gupta

Abstract

Through this essay, I explore the role of bodies in Part I: "A Voyage to Lilliput" and Part II: "A Voyage to Brobdingnag" of *Gulliver's Travels*. In my reading, I draw connections between the British Empire, Gulliver's identity, his agency and sexuality, and bodies. This paper also explores how the body is viewed in these parts of the novel under the purview of Mikhail Bakhtin's 'grotesque realism'. Through this study, Gulliver's relations to the body become extremely complicated; they aid the blurring boundaries between the self and the other, so much so that they begin to assimilate into each other. I argue that the concoction of the grotesque, satire and Gulliver's experiences results in the development of a multi-dimensional relationship between the Empire and the grotesque body. In *Travels*, the grotesque is used as a trope to invoke a sense of disgust, which facilitates the satirical function of critiquing the English society, and by extension, the Empire.

Keywords: Gulliver's Travels, grotesque, empire, sexuality, identity

Written by Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* is a four-part prose satire, which first came out in 1726. The role of the body in this text is pivotal to its understanding, especially in Part I: "A Voyage to Lilliput" and Part II: "A Voyage to Brobdingnag". Questions about the British Empire, Captain Lemuel Gulliver's identity, his agency and sexuality are all linked to the study of 'bodies' in this text. This paper explores how the body is viewed in these parts of the novel, linking it to the overarching theme of 'the grotesque'. Gulliver's relations to the body are

extremely complicated; they aid the blurring boundaries between the self and the other, so much so that they begin to assimilate into each other. The concoction of the grotesque, satire and Gulliver's experiences results in the development of a multi-dimensional relationship between the Empire and the grotesque body. In *Travels*, 'the grotesque' is used as a trope to invoke a sense of disgust, which facilitates the function of the satire to critique the English society, and thereby the Empire.

The concept of grotesque realism was addressed by Mikhail Bakhtin in his critical work, *Rabelais and His World*. The main principle of grotesque realism is the degradation of the spiritual, noble, abstract and ideal to bring it down to the earth and materialise it; excessiveness, exaggeration and expressiveness are the key components of this concept (Bakhtin 303). According to Bakhtin, "To degrade also means to concern oneself with the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs; it therefore relates to acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth" (21). By emphasising pregnancy and birth, Bakhtin relates this concept particularly to the female body. However, grotesque realism represents "all the people" (Bakhtin 19). So, its scope can be extended beyond the female body. The grotesque body is associated with openness; it is primal, unbound, unfinished and protrusive (Bakhtin 26).

In Part I of the text, Gulliver finds himself in the island of Lilliput, whose natives are notably smaller than him in size. He roams around in the island with a complete view of everything, owing to his gigantic body size. This swollen state of Gulliver's body is a "shocking sight" for the inhabitants of the island; there seems to be a direct relationship between largeness and grotesqueness. Fascinated with this enormous creature, the Lilliputians start deriving entertainment from Gulliver's basic actions; his body is almost like an exaggerated version of the Lilliputians' bodies. It enacts the grotesque by celebrating the biological functions of the hyperbolic body, such as urinating and defecating. Gulliver's body, in the view of the

Lilliputians, has expanded beyond normal limits. As he recalls in an episode in Brobdingnag, this magnified version of his body revealed to the natives "great Holes in my disagreeable Skin; that the Stumps of my beard were ten Times stronger than the Bristles of a Boar; and my Complexion made up of several Colours altogether" (Swift 83).

The major concerns of these diminutive beings are related to Gulliver's bodily needs, namely clothing, feeding, and disposing of his waste. His appetite, the natives fear, could lead to a famine in their island. To resolve this, they come up with a daily allowance for the amount of meat and drink he could consume, which is the same amount sufficient to support 1728 Lilliputian subjects (Swift 38). Next, Gulliver speaks about the "Necessities of Nature", which amounts to the scatological question of his need to defecate; he calls this bowel-related activity "an unclean action" (Swift 24). By calling this an "Adventure", Gulliver makes it seem like an endeavour—with performative qualities—into the unknown. His obsession with the scatological is reiterated when he draws attention towards his genital functions in the fire episode. When the Empress' apartment catches fire, Gulliver employs a tactic; he urinates "to the proper Places, that in three Minute the Fire was wholly extinguished" (Swift 50). His urinating on the palace is an act of degradation; he brings down what is held up, directly linking it to Bakhtin's idea of the grotesque.

The Lilliputians, who are the viewers of his grotesque body, troubled by his treachery and the cost of his maintenance, ultimately devise plans to kill Gulliver. Interestingly, these plans are all directed towards his body; most of them are associated with the reduction of the grotesque aspects of his body. Their contemplations about killing him range from blinding him to incinerating him in his house. One of these plans deals with starving him, "gradually lessening your Establishment; by which, for want of sufficient Food, you would grow weak and faint, and lose your Appetite, and consequently decay" (Swift 64). Since grotesqueness is connected to gigantism, shrinking and degrading Gulliver's body would reduce its

grotesqueness. They also consider strewing "a poisonous Juice on your Shirts and Sheets, which would make you tear your own Flesh" (Swift 62). There is a clear sense of disgust and malice that is highlighted in the graphicness of these discourses; the size of his body and his physicality, being quite surreal for the Lilliputians, are associated with unpleasantness. Through an exaggerated description of anal and genital actions, Gulliver almost attains the status of a digesting and decaying object of spectacle. Despite his hugeness and strength, he remains fairly passive throughout his stay in Lilliput, being chained, poked with arrows and tied to the ground. This can be ascribed to the excessive visibility of his body because of his relative size, and its resulting grotesqueness.

The grotesque body gets inverted when Gulliver reaches the island of Brobdingnag. Here, Gulliver plays the part of being a minuscule creature, and the natives, in comparison to his body size, are enormous. When amplification and hyperbolism are associated with largeness and thereby the grotesque, Gulliver becomes the spectator of grotesque bodies. With his magnified, microscopic vision, he observes and scorns at what he sees, mainly insects and the bodies of women. While in Brobdingnag, he spends most of his time in the company of women and as a result, observes their bodies. These women also become manipulators of what he sees, by placing and positioning him wherever they wish to; this is quite literal when he says, "*Glumdalclitch* had set me in my Box upon a Window" (Swift 99). Because of his size, Gulliver lacks agency as he cannot choose what he looks at. Using his magnified European gaze, Gulliver goes from embodying the grotesque to being the observer of the grotesque bodies of Brobdingnagian women.

Swift lays emphasis on the parts of human body which are either protruding out or can be entered, adding to the grotesque corporeality. In an episode, Gulliver observes and gives a graphic account of a woman's breast (a protrusive part of the body), in which he says, "I must confess no Object ever disgusted me so much as the Sight of her monstrous Breast, which I

cannot tell what to compare with, so as to give the curious Reader an Idea . . . that nothing could appear more nauseous" (Swift 82–83). While studying this expression of abhorrence in relation to the grotesque, it is important to take into account that he is observing a nurse breastfeeding a baby, a basic biological activity. This adds to the discourse of the grotesque as he magnifies the unfolding of a primal, gendered bodily process. Gulliver shapes the narrative by providing such descriptions, trying to assert his agency as a scientific thinker, and more importantly, as a male member of the English society.

In his descriptions of the grotesque body, Gulliver's sense of self begins to fluctuate. Despite his attempts at establishing himself as a human, he is often reduced to an object. When he visits the chief temple with Glumdalclitch, he looks at the statues on the sides of the temple. Here, he decides to prove his role as an independent observer (as opposed to a spectacle) when he says, "I measured a little Finger which had fallen down from one of these Statues, and lay unperceived among some Rubbish; and found it exactly four Foot and an Inch in Length" (Swift 103). However, the very fact that wherever he went, he did so in a "Travelling-Closet; which *Glumdalclitch* held in her Lap" (Swift 102), reduces him to an object, just like the little finger in his nurse's collection. This disembodiment makes the concept of grotesque uncanny; Gulliver is de-familiarised from his own body as he comes to be seen as an object. From his very initial moments in Brobdingnag, his body begins to be commodified. By saying that "My Master's Design was to shew me in all the Towns by the Way, and to step out of the Road for Fifty or an Hundred Miles, to any Village or Person of Quality's House where he might expect Custom" (Swift 90), Gulliver clearly indicates that he is now just an article of spectacle for the natives to marvel at. Moreover, he is sold by his Master to the Queen, and for a thousand pieces of gold, Gulliver becomes "her Majesty's most humble Creature and Vassal" (Swift 92).

The reduction of Gulliver's body to an object of female consumption becomes even more apparent when he describes what happens when he is in the company of the Queen's maids of honour. Swift writes about Gulliver's state of mind:

> The Maids of Honour often invited *Glumdalclitch* to their Apartments, and desired she would bring me along with her, on Purpose to have the Pleasure of seeing and touching me. They would often strip me naked from Top to Toe, and lay me at full Length in their Bosoms; wherewith I was much disgusted . . . (107)

Here, female sexual desire seems to be motivating the objectification and subsequent consumption of Gulliver's body. Gulliver, instead of being treated like a human, is used by them "without any manner of Ceremony, like a Creature who had no sort of Consequence" (Swift 108). His sexuality is not really taken into account by these women, for in addition to stripping him, they undress themselves in front of him, exposing their naked bodies. He is "placed on their Toylet directly before their naked Bodies; which . . . was very far from being a tempting Sight" (Swift 108).

Interestingly, even as he expounds on his treatment as a sexual prop, he reiterates the horrors of the grotesque, which is enabled by the size of the Brobdingnagian women's bodies. The shifting identities of Gulliver from being a man, to an object, to a sexual prop get even more complicated when he gives a further account of his experience with his favourite maid of honour. This is, "a pleasant frolicsome Girl of Sixteen, [who] would sometimes set me astride upon one of her Nipples, with many other Tricks, wherein the Reader will excuse me for not being over particular" (Swift 108). The complication arises as this account gives the reader a sense that as a sexual prop, Gulliver is also phallic in nature, much like a dildo. Even when he is used as a phallic sexual prop, he does not forget to highlight the fact that he is displeased

with such encounters; he asks "*Glumdalclitch* to contrive some excuse for not seeing that young Lady any more" (Swift 108).

Gulliver is an instrument used by these women to attain their sexual liberty. When these maids of honour use Gulliver as a dildo, they strip him of not only his maleness, but also his human identity, reducing him to the status of a "thing". The introduction of sexual props means the substitution of something natural (the phallus) with something artificial. If we read the arrival of Gulliver in Brobdingnag as the import of sexual props into the kingdom, it also implies women taking control of their own sexuality, inducing anxieties of being objectified among men. In *Travels*, it seems that these women exchange the sex toy that has become of Gulliver, a symbol of male sexuality being passed around.[1]

This exchange also implies a sort of inter-changeability at work between Gulliver and the female figures. Even when Gulliver talks about the body odour and skin of these women, he recalls a Lilliputian's experience of his body. He talks about how an intimate friend of his in Lilliput once complained about a strong smell emanating from Gulliver's body (Swift 107). He has a fairly complicated relationship with the female other. Through his description of their grotesque bodies, he others them, but the grotesqueness of his own body brings him closer to them. The grotesque female body becomes a mirror in which he recognises his grotesque self.

Gulliver, a representative of the British Empire, travels to multiple foreign lands and marvels at their inhabitants, making the Empire a moving body. Through *Travels*, Swift attempts to satirize the social, political and economic conditions of the Empire's centre, and provides a critique of the colonial project and modern science. As a result, in his experiences of the lands of Brobdingnag and Lilliput, Gulliver finds snippets of England, for the account on a whole is a critique of the English self. This links the bodies—his own and the ones he

[1] This alludes to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's work, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire.* Sedgwick suggests that such exchanges are practiced among men with the bodies of women.

observes—to the body politic, and the grotesqueness of his body makes the metropolis of the Empire a grotesque body as well. Since the grotesque focuses on parts of a whole, it does not make one see the whole image or the larger picture. Gulliver's engagement with parts of the body, in this sense, becomes metonymical in its representation of the Empire. One can only detect the grotesqueness of the Empire by zooming in on the parts of its seemingly "fair and smooth" surface, much like what Gulliver does with bodies in Brobdingnag. If we define the Empire's centre as an ever-expanding ruling body endeavouring to assimilate the world, we can say that just like primal bodily functions, the Empire is unbounded too. This also links the meaning of being human to the Empire. In *Travels*, Gulliver acquires several roles, ranging from a patriarch in his family back in England to a sexual prop at the hands of the Brobdingnagian women. He is constantly dehumanised, but his very manner of narration is satirical, which is at times dehumanising. Consequently, the meaning of the Empire constructed in the midst of Gulliver's species-identification crisis gets complicated, owing to its close relations with the human body and its primal activities.

As a satire, *Travels* brings to light the disgust-evoking aspects of the Empire. Satire has a strong literary relation with the grotesque, especially the scatological aspects of it; it exhibits the body in all its grotesqueness, dominated by its primary needs, combining the social condition with the corporeal. In grotesque realism, the body is presented "as something universal"; "it is opposed to severance from the material and bodily roots of the world" (Bakhtin 19). Bakhtin writes that "the grotesque is always satire" as it exaggerates the inappropriate (306). The association of the body and the outside world is embedded in it. As grotesque realism focuses on elements that either protrude out of the body or can be entered, the boundary between the outer and the bodily gets blurred. Satire forms a ground for the utilisation of the body to critique the society. In Parts I and II of the text, Swift focuses on the concept of bodies being observed in a microscopic manner; this enables us to see the repulsion-

inducing grotesque. The Empire is thus the grotesque body, which, when subjected to close scrutiny by means of satire, makes one see its follies.

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SHARMILA RAY

Nib

Under the shade of a lamp the black gold pen looks at its nib
aware that it has locked centuries of magic alphabets
whose DNA lingers inside dried ink.
Seen retrospectively, cities, towns, events, accidents, names, numbers,
movements, gestures, stories, myths, are all words grafted
on relentless time.
The nib dreams, extending and linking to other infinite nibs.

Flirting with Euripides in Athens or Camus in absinthe scented Tipasa,
remaining alone with Calvino in impossible landscapes and meditating
with Tagore, it is conscious of the powers of gods and demons
in whose shadow cities bloom and men make history.
Without saying a word it forms words, mysteriously outliving
the mortal body.

Alphabets

Alphabets march to enter my heart
but an ancient wind stops them.
They get lost
they die
without forming a word.
However, in the evening they return
with kites
with birds.

Coloured alphabets
sitting arrogantly on my desk
deriding me.
Alphabets mist of my armpits.
Alphabets the cotton stretched
over my breasts.
Alphabets the invisible horizon.
I'm swept.
In the sense-space of my thought
alphabets grow again on their own
as do the fern
much like the nail on your finger.
Alphabets mother of words.
Alphabets word-forest.
And if we do loose ourselves
in the forest, it is exactly then
that we find our voice

About the Poet

Sharmila Ray is a poet and non-fiction essayist, writing in English and anthologized and featured in India and abroad. Her poems, short stories and non-fictional essays have appeared in various national and international magazines and journals. She is an Associate Professor and Head of the Department of History at City College, Kolkata. She has authored nine books of poetry. She conducted poetry workshops organized by British Council, Poetry Society of India, Sahitya Akademi. She is the Vice-president of Intercultural Poetry and Performance Library. She has been reading her poems in India and abroad. Her poems have been translated into Hindi, Bengali, Urdu, Slovene, Hebrew and Spanish. Currently she is working on a manuscript of non-fictional essays.

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MARK ANTONY ROSSI

I Think, Therefore, I'm an Outsider

This is exactly as it implies:

only outsiders think.

Why

Maybe the connected

Need not think

Why

Maybe the outsider

Has little choice

Why

Maybe thinking

Is an act of survival

Why

Maybe thinking

Is an antidote

To family

To fascism

To fanatics

Why

Maybe thinking
Threatens unity.

Broke My Ass on a Memory

writers are not journalists or historians
we remember what is necessary
and discard the remains
like orange peels
for memory
is a bad lover
unwilling
to share the bed

About the Poet

Mark Antony Rossi is author of *Walkabout: Thoughts on the Human Condition* listed at http://www.somapublishing.com . He may be contacted at merlotmedicine@yahoo.com.

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VIGHNESH HAMPAPURA

Dead Man's Land

If you travel the boundaries
And reach the gate point,
Where they cease the barbed wire
and cease the fire of arms,
and open the metals with arms—
Dig the land there,
Six feet long and three feet wide,
I live in that furrow, breathing,
Soil in, Soil out.

Thus Spake the Mirror

And thus spake the mirror:

You close your eyes, and the world is absent.
I have none the chances to close mine.
I may be a hundred eyes;
But to close, and dream—
I have no eyelids, neither the ignorance.
That's your forte. Is it a fort too?

Truths you deny, or perhaps, don't know;
Sweet lies that the senility of your innocence believes,
To present to you that,
That is my forte.

You aren't you.

Every time, you show me your face and beam.

For? Half a minute?

Wash up, and look again,

You might see what I see: look—

Two black shining eyeballs.

It shines, it's youth.

It's just black beyond!

Enthusiasm out of place.

Desire out of darkness.

Time out in repentance.

Vain.

Another foot of human error.

Get up, go.

About the Poet

Vighnesh Hampapura is an English undergraduate student at Ashoka University, Sonepat. His interests include English, Kannada and Sanskrit literature, Carnatic music, and Indian theatre. He may be contacted at vighnesh.hj_ug20@ashoka.edu.in.

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ANIMESH PAUL

The Dead Man Alive!

"I can't go on. I will go on."

(*The Unnameable*).

Open at page no. Sixty four,

Discover the body---- folded,

Wrinkled and torn as the man

Dead for years and years together

Intoxicates me time and again....

When at midnight

I feel dizzy with the stuff I have,

Dare I touch that body with wet hands.

And I shiver and shudder

To flash through the time...

A dead and torn up body

But still alive!

With every bit in set order,

The blood, the bone marrow

And wonder! the pulse which is me is still

Alive and awake among the dead...!

About the Poet

Animesh Paul, a young and promising poet from West Bengal, writes prolifically both in Bengali and English. He did his masters from the University of Calcutta. Among several of his

published poems, some drew special attention of Shankha Ghosh, the most powerful and dynamic Bengali poet of this time. Apart from writing poetry, Paul has also translated some of Tagore's songs into English maintaining the original Bengali tune.

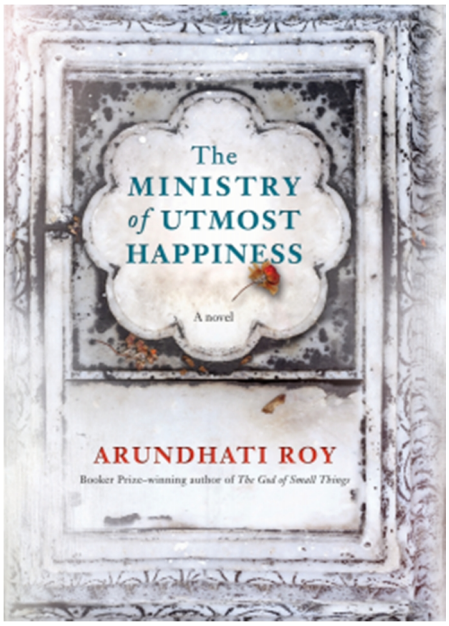
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Book-Review

The Goddess of Small Things:

Arundhati Roy's Dazzle in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*

Pratiti Shirin



The Ministry of Utmost Happiness

Arundhati Roy

Penguin Random House India, 2017

ISBN 10: 067008963X

ISBN 13: 9780670089635

From the maker of *The God of Small Things* and the 'Save Narmada' movement, the reader gets Arundhati Roy's second novel after twenty years. Beneath the strong underlying political message that this book is infused with, the novel is essentially a tale of utmost human compassion. The novel has two complex subplots. From being set in a down-to-earth neighbourhood of Delhi called Shahjahanabad which watches the birth and growth of Aftab (Anjum) into adolescence and middle age, the novel shifts to a neighbourhood in central Delhi and eventually into the valleys of Kashmir.

The beginning of the novel is rather gloomy. It starts with the transgender Anjum who has taken residence in a graveyard on the outskirt of Shahjahanabad after having left her

community for unknown reasons. Anjum is middle-aged and her only friend is the graveyard Imam who surprisingly gives her protection which enables her to ward off the unwilling attention of local goons. Chapter by chapter, Anjum's story unfolds as the reader gets to know about her gradual transformation from being Aftab to Anjum: how her mother wanted to go beyond the world of language when she discovered her baby was genderless because in her mother tongue Urdu—the only language she spoke—all things had a gender, except her baby. We get to know how Aftab despite his removal of girl parts, is drawn to the community of Khwabgah where he discovers others like him, after his discovery of someone called Bombay Silk in the city. So, despite Aftab's mother's offering at Hazrat Sarmad's shrine and his father's belief that the tendencies of which the local quack Dr. Nabi spoke, would not flourish in Aftab, the latter followed Bombay Silk one day into the intricate world of Khwabgah when he was fourteen and afterwards, became a permanent resident of that place. Aftab's life goes on and given a choice between manhood and womanhood, it takes him only three minutes to make his choice. Thus, begins her lifetime injection of cheap hormones prescribed to her by Dr. Mukhtar who gives her a fake vagina which is more of a source of discomfort than pleasure to her.

The residents of Khwabgah are an isolated community but they are intertwined in a complex way with society. They have to go outside the boundaries of Khwabgah—their known world of comfort—to carry on their daily business. There is a TV here as well which gives them access to the happenings of the socio-political world outside. This is 2000 and with the fall of Twin Tower in New York, India too begins to change in ways previously unthinkable. We are told about the rise of Narendra Modi, called 'Gujarat ka Lalla' whose encouragement to the rise of Hindu nationalism results in a riot in Gujarat in which Anjum finds herself in the train trying to go there for a religious pilgrimage, seeking blessings for her adopted daughter Zainab. The reader gets to know only later that all men and women on that train were butchered or raped except Anjum whom the Hindu nationalists refused to kill because that was supposed

to bring in bad luck. Anjum discovers that she only can bring 'butcher's luck' (66). With this discovery and with Zainab's detachment from her during the period she was away, Anjum develops an aversion to the world she used to love so much. But the 'duniya' is also no longer a place to which she can return and as a result, she settles on the outskirts of Shahjahanabad in the graveyard. Gradually, she develops her Jannat guest house and funeral services—services to bury those whom society has rejected in life as well as death, like prostitutes.

It is at this point that the novel takes an interesting twist and we are introduced to the enigmatic S. Tilottama. Her mother was a Keralite social worker who had her outside wedlock as a result of which Tilo grew up as her own mother's adopted daughter. That lifestyle leaves a permanent scar on her psyche. We get first introduced to her through the reminiscences of her friend Biplab Dasgupta who reveals to the reader of his endearing love—along with that of two other men—for Tilo from the time they were college sweethearts. But time has flown with Dasgupta being now a government official, his friend Naga a prominent journalist and Musa who hails from Kashmir turning into an underground freedom fighter for the *azaadi* of Kashmir after his daughter and wife are killed. The novel reveals how after more than thirty years, the lives of the four get interwoven after Musa gets supposedly killed. And it is only through the narration of Tilo herself that we know that such is not the case: how she remains in touch with Musa her college sweetheart, throughout the years and who tells her how he has taken up arms against the provocation of one Major Amrik Singh after the killing of his family. The novel is essentially a tragedy of modern times. We get to know that this Amrik Singh isn't spared his fate either. He commits suicide after having killed his own son and wife in the States after having sought political asylum there but being unable to escape the eyes of the families whose members he killed through torture in the infamous interrogation cell, Shiraz cinema hall in Kashmir.

But ultimately, the novel remains a tale of endearing love. The reader is revealed how with ease, Musa is able to empty his heart to Tilo because '…they trusted each other so peculiarly that they knew…that whoever it was that the other person loved had to be worth loving' (368). So even though Tilo has a baby with the man she loves, she decides not to keep it because of her own traumatic relation with her mother. But this doesn't stop her from rearing the child she finds stranded at Jantar Mantar—a platform for holding non-violent protests against various types of corruption in the heart of Delhi. It is only fit that Tilo who refuses to bear biologically the child of the man she loves—a freedom fighter or a terrorist, depending on who is looking at this—ends up kidnapping a found baby whose mother is a Maoist rebel and father, six unidentified policemen. And names the baby after the freedom fighter's dead baby with another woman. In a way, the baby is the most appropriate heir to Tilo's freedom fighter friend. It is also not irrational that the baby should be brought up, away from the *duniya* with all its conflicts that the baby's mother faced, by a group of *hijras* (transgenders) who give the baby absolute love and protection. This is where the world of Anjum and Tilo meets. Roy has an astounding understanding of the depth of human emotions, the most powerful of which is love between a baby and a woman and secondly, love between a woman and a man. Roy does not bring up the issue of love between the same gender (which is hotly contested all over the world currently) although she is very close to doing this by making her other key protagonist, a *hijra*.

But what Roy has done with language or rather, how she has broken through the barriers of language, is astonishing. Like her transgender protagonist, the language she uses is transgender as well if there is any such category of language. From the use of Urdu *shayari* and ghazals to using Urdu obscenities commonly heard on the streets of Delhi (and by providing an English asterisked translation of those at the bottom of the page) to using political satire, Roy has experimented with ways that language is, or, rather, could be. She is in a league

of her own. This novel undoubtedly should be made part of every syllabus on postmodernism/deconstructionism.

About the Reviewer

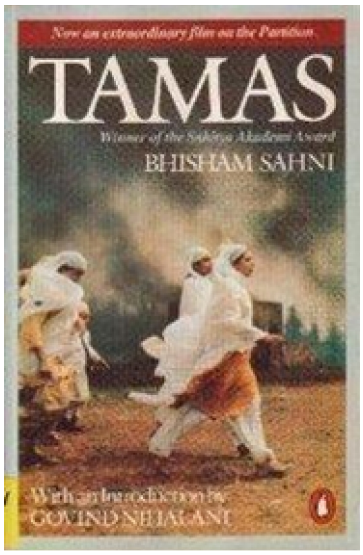
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Book-Review

Lost Identities: The religious politics of manipulation

Gaayatree Sneha Sharma



Tamas

Bhisham Sahni

Penguin Books India, 2001

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Identities in *Tamas* are never wholly internal. They are externally constructed and the same architecture gets manifested along varying degrees in the novel's characters. This paper poses that while the representation of some identities allude to a slight obscurity of the internal, others represent an entire takeover of the same by the external, the public. The forces with which an identity is made to conform to the public are also different. However, they are portrayed along one broad dimension of 'internalisation' in *Tamas*. The processes that are brought into use for the materialisation of this conformity and the degrees to which they are able to secure it in individuals are essential for the facilitation of nationalist propagandas. Hence, it can be argued that the entire construction of identities in *Tamas* rests on these two premises of processes and degrees of influence. If the construction is successful in its entirety, the public wipes out the 'individual' and plants a nationalist subject in its place. However, if a wholesome takeover is not materialised, one can never say that the public has failed to penetrate the individual. It is

always present, especially when tiny stains of manage to manipulate the individual in certain instances. In any case, the individual can never escape the shackles of nationalism.

The novel confirms the pervasive presence of not one, but multiple nationalisms inspired by strong religious affiliations. Each one of them exists only so long as they differ from the others 'that the Muslims too have their do's and dont's, they do not eat pork while the Hindu's do not eat beef, that the Sikhs eat Jhatka meat while the Muslims eat halal…' (51). At the same time, the same nationalisms call out to people with similarities to come around and conform to them. They press the need for similar people who share the same belief system to be strung into a singularity. 'When we come, clad in khadi, brooms and shovels in our hands to their locality, they regard us as their own' (62). Nationalisms hence, run along a tricky slope. They owe their existence to difference and to similarity, both at the same time. Even if one starts at the basics of this conformity to nationalisms, one can see that as long as singularity among people who conform is deemed essential, identity of any conforming individual becomes something that is shared with others of their own kind and hence, no longer stands private.

It stands public in two cases here: One, because its construction relies on diktats issued by their respective religions, the public they willingly conform to. Two, insomuch that every identity confirming to one single religious nationalism is broadly the same, for it is shared with many others. However, this construction undertaken by the public is not complete despite the fact that its dictates are being conformed to. It stands complete when the premises of difference and similarity are exaggerated to the greatest possible extent as a result of which, the same nationalism and its cause is echoed and furthered by the subject. An elderly man in conversation with Bakshiji is the perfect subject whose identity furthers reinstates the cause of muslim nationalism. 'Freedom of Hindustan will be for the Hindus. It is in sovereign Pakistan alone that Muslims will be really free' (34).

If not in their outwardly representation, identities in *Tamas* lie in their affinity with the external. However, that affinity too does not emerge on its own. There is something that the public appeals to within the individual which leads to an internalisation of the external. Different appeals are the processes through which a takeover of the identity takes place. The subjects of this appeal that the public targets range from a desire for power, money and in most cases, a chance at survival in *Tamas.* 'As his eyes fell on the ugly, bloated pig, Nathu cursed himself for having taken on so repulsive and haza,rdous a task' (5). The repulsion that Nathu is acquainted with is something inherent, something private that stems from within him as soon as he thinks about the job he has at hand. However, that speck of the private is concealed by Nathu himself as he conforms to the public for the latter promises monetary benefit in return. True that this does not lead to Nathu becoming a devout nationalist. Neither does it ensure his loyalty to a single nationalism. However, even as identity construction here stands incomplete, its not allowed to remain thoroughly internal either. Through the tactics of manipulation, even an unwilling individual is made to adopt an external identity no matter how incomplete that might be.

This adoption may not always be forceful though. When it takes place more willingly, the internal identity is not only made to conform to the external, as in the case of Nathu. Rather, it completely transformed to become the external. The cruciality of this transformation lies in the becoming and no longer in the conforming. In his attempt at killing the hen in order to get inducted into the category of initiates, 'Ranvir's forehead was covered with cold sweat and his face turned deathly pale' (84). However, the public transforms this hesitation into devout nationalism, that Ranvir later represents, by appealing to his lust for power (made apparent as the novel progresses), and by exacerbating a sense of similarity that the likes of Ranvir are supposed to share with the 'Arya Youth'. I like to call this process aspirational similarity which is brought heavily into play in Ranvir's case for turning him into a nationalistic fanatic.

Similarity with the 'Arya youth' is exaggerated to a level that the individual keeps aspiring to that, in the hope of reaching it someday. Through these two processes, any sense of an internal identity is no longer hidden. Rather, it is completely wiped out and the identity that the subject now embodies is purely external.

Quite unlike Ranvir, a takeover of an identity by the public might not be that wholesome. However, that is no way to say that the private manages to shut off the public as and when it desires. Nathu and Iqbal Singh (Ahmed) in the respective public manipulation that their character falls into, portray a strong claim that the novel seems to be making. Even when identities do not become the external or completely stand in for the public by staunchly conforming to and further propagating the agenda of nationalism(s), one can still never be truly private. Whether it is a material benefit that the public bestows Nathu with, a chance at survival that an externally imposed Muslim identity lends to Iqbal Singh (Ahmed), or a sense of belonging that it equips thousands of conformists with, by appealing to the desires of the self, the public is shaping us constantly. Even in the slight alterations it causes in the private along the lines of what an individual can and cannot do, one can never escape the confines of multiple nationalisms. They are always there, like pervasive cancer cells within one's own interiority. Silently disarming internal resistance at first, only to thoroughly enslave later.

About the Reviewer

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